Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program

Balancing Resource Use and Conservation

Hunters Hole

2018 Annual Report

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

August 2019

Work conducted under LCR MSCP Work Task E31

Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program Steering Committee Members

Federal Participant Group

Bureau of Reclamation
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
National Park Service
Bureau of Land Management
Bureau of Indian Affairs
Western Area Power Administration

Arizona Participant Group

Arizona Department of Water Resources
Arizona Electric Power Cooperative, Inc.
Arizona Game and Fish Department
Arizona Power Authority
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City of Lake Havasu City
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City of Yuma
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Mohave Valley Irrigation and Drainage District
Mohave Water Conservation District
North Gila Valley Irrigation and Drainage District
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Unit "B" Irrigation and Drainage District
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Yuma County Water Users' Association
Yuma Irrigation District
Yuma Mesa Irrigation and Drainage District

Other Interested Parties Participant Group

QuadState Local Governments Authority
Desert Wildlife Unlimited

California Participant Group

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Coachella Valley Water District
Colorado River Board of California
Bard Water District
Imperial Irrigation District
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Hualapai Tribe
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Ducks Unlimited
Lower Colorado River RC&D Area, Inc.
The Nature Conservancy

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Multi-Species Conservation Program
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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AWPF	Arizona Water Protection Fund
Border Patrol	U.S. Border Patrol
FY	fiscal year
LCR MSCP	Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program
lidar	light detection and ranging
Reclamation	Bureau of Reclamation

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This annual report summarizes all activities that have occurred at Hunters Hole from October 1, 2017, through September 31, 2018, which is Federal fiscal year (FY) 2018. Water use is presented for the calendar year, January 1 through December 31, 2018, consistent with the Colorado River Accounting and Water Use Report: Arizona, California, and Nevada, Calendar Year 2018 (Bureau of Reclamation [Reclamation] 2019).

1.1 Background

Hunters Hole, 44 acres in size, is located in Arizona just south of Yuma and north of San Luis. In the 1950s, flood events formed a series of interconnected ponds with adjacent marsh areas and Fremont cottonwood-Goodding's willow (*Populus fremontii-Salix gooddingii*) (hereafter cottonwood-willow) stands. Water levels were subsequently maintained by groundwater, irrigation drain flows, and a connecting channel to the main river channel. Over time, the habitat became degraded due to reduced flows, which isolated the area from the main stem of the river. Most of the habitat was eventually lost due to declining groundwater levels and wildfires.

In 2001, local officials from State, Tribal, and Federal agencies worked together to develop a plan to restore wildlife habitat in the area as well as to increase public safety and border security. The restoration concept, including site drawings and the implementation schedule, were reviewed with the U.S. Border Patrol (Border Patrol) to ensure compatibility with international border security concerns.

In 2010, the Yuma Crossing National Heritage Area Corporation, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, restored 44 acres at Hunters Hole. The Arizona Water Protection Fund (AWPF), in cooperation with the Lower Colorado River Multi-Species Conservation Program (LCR MSCP), funded the Hunters Hole restoration project. The AWPF-provided funding was used to clear non-native vegetation and to contour the site. The LCR MSCP provided funding for rehabilitation of the existing groundwater well and fabrication of the irrigation system manifold to allow for automation in the future. The restored site consisted of riparian and dry upland habitats. Restoration activities included selective clearing of invasive reeds (giant reed [*Arundo donax*] and common reed [*Phragmites australis*]) and saltcedar (*Tamarix* spp.), installation of infrastructure to allow for managed flooding, and the planting of cottonwood-willow and honey mesquite (*Prosopis glandulosa*).

After the project was completed in 2013, the LCR MSCP agreed to manage the site as a conservation area and provide funding for its long-term operation and maintenance. The LCR MSCP is responsible for the long-term maintenance costs of Hunters Hole through 2055 (the life of the program).

2.0 CONSERVATION AREA INFORMATION

2.1 Purpose

The purpose of Hunters Hole is to create 44 acres of riparian habitat that will be managed for southwestern willow flycatchers (*Empidonax traillii extimus*) and other LCR MSCP covered species that utilize the cottonwood-willow and honey mesquite land cover types.

2.2 Location

Hunters Hole is located in Arizona in Reach 7 of the LCR MSCP planning area at River Mile 3 (figure 1). The total project footprint is 44 acres (figure 2).

2.3 Landownership

Hunters Hole is owned and managed by Reclamation and is on Reclamation withdrawn lands.

2.4 Water

Hunters Hole does not have a Colorado River water entitlement. The Arizona Water Resources Department governs the use of Arizona State groundwater. When Hunters Hole was approved for development, up to 3,000 acre-feet of Arizona groundwater was allocated for irrigation of native habitat. Irrigation water is pumped from the existing groundwater well; a flow meter was installed to track usage.

2.5 Agreements

Hunters Hole is located on lands owned and managed by Reclamation; therefore, no agreements with other parties have been signed.

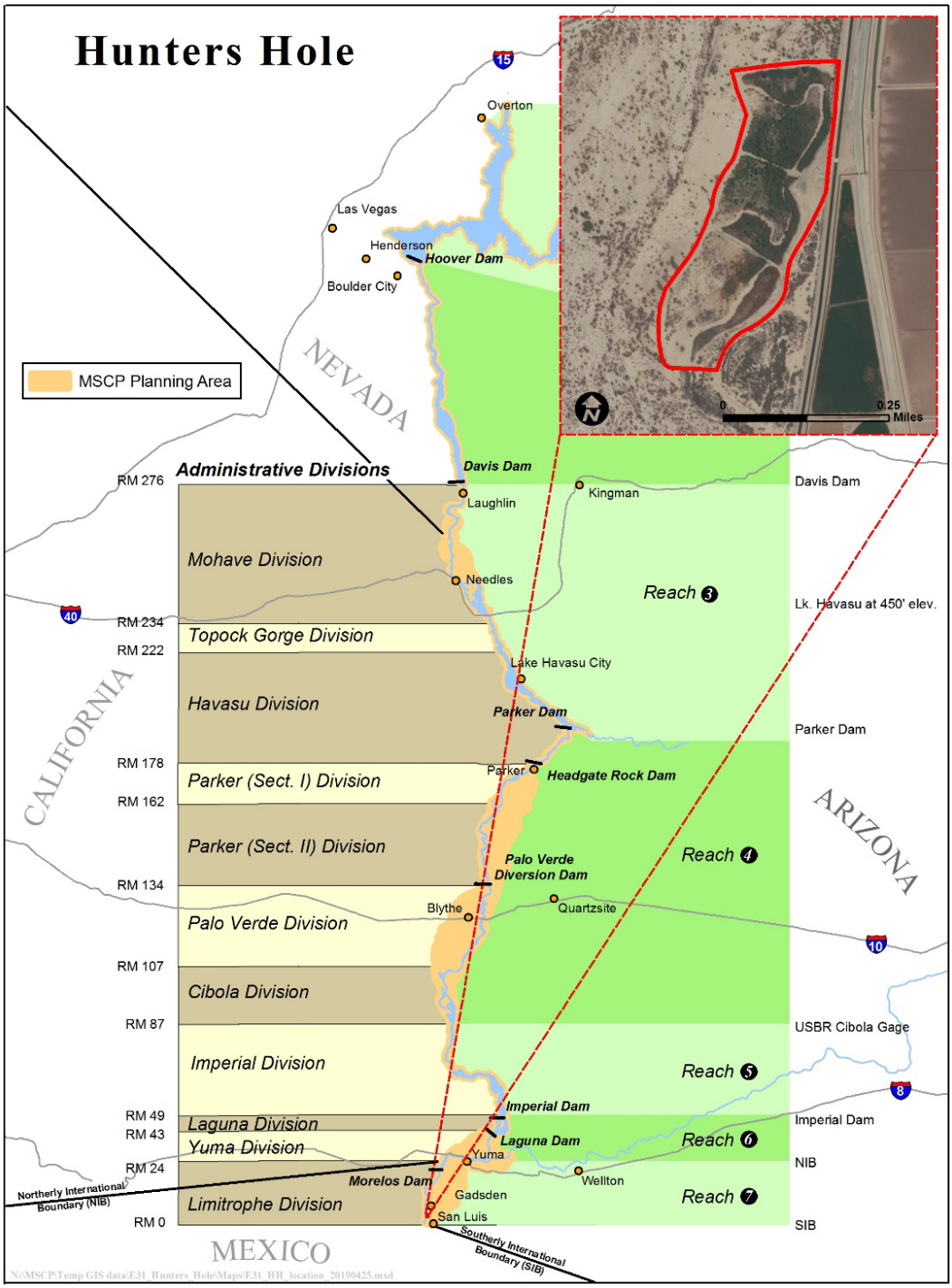

Figure 1.—LCR MSCP planning area with Hunters Hole inset.

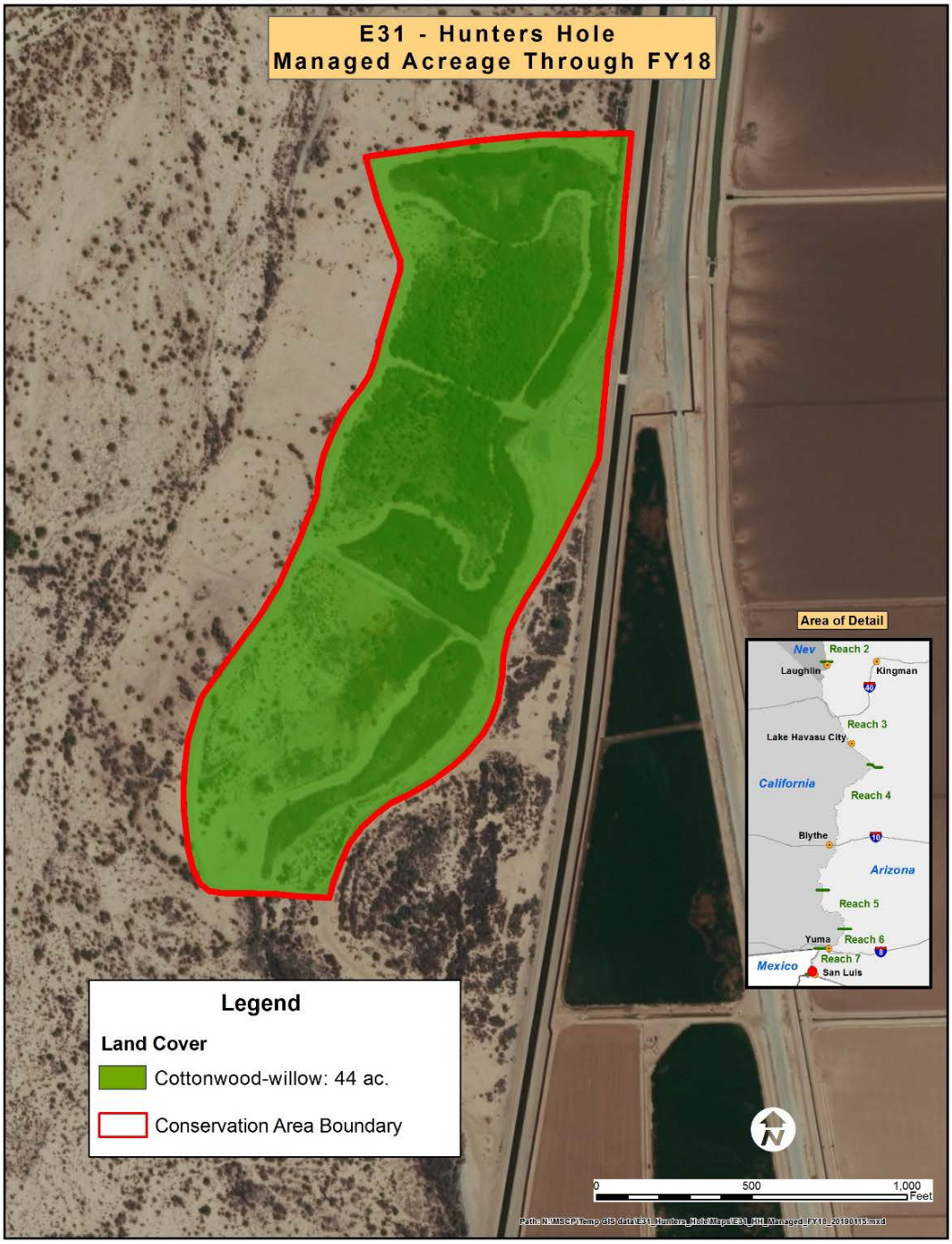

Figure 2.—Hunters Hole managed acreage through FY18.

2.6 Public Use

Hunters Hole is open to the public; however, activities may be restricted depending on safety concerns.

2.7 Law Enforcement

The Border Patrol is responsible for all law enforcement at Hunters Hole due to its location along the U.S. border security fence near the Southerly International Boundary between Arizona and Mexico. Reclamation continues to work with the Border Patrol regarding security issues and notifies them prior to each site visit using an established visitation protocol.

2.8 Wildfire Management

Federal, State, and local fire agencies, either by existing management agreements or mutual aid agreements, will provide wildland fire suppression, incident dispatch, fire investigation, and potential fire restrictions. The full range of suppression strategies is available to managers provided that selected options do not compromise firefighter or public safety, are cost effective, consider the benefits of suppression and the values to be protected, and are consistent with resource objectives (LCR MSCP 2010). Reclamation may assist the Bureau of Land Management with fire suppression by activating the electrical groundwater pump located within the security fencing enclosure. The pump can be turned on remotely from Reclamation's Yuma Area Office, or manually onsite, to flood each irrigation cell (see figure 2) using separate valves for each cell.

3.0 HABITAT DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT

3.1 Planting

No planting occurred at Hunters Hole in FY18.

3.2 Irrigation

Irrigation water is pumped using a 100-horsepower electric motor coupled to a groundwater pump. After reaching the surface, irrigation water is routed through an irrigation manifold that delivers water to the five habitat cells. Fifteen

irrigation cycles were run during the 2018 calendar year. Staff monitored irrigation cycles, water use, and costs in a continuing efforts to run the site as efficiently as possible.

3.3 Site Management

Maintenance activities can be separated into two categories: (1) infrastructure maintenance and (2) habitat maintenance. Infrastructure maintenance includes maintenance of roads, groundwater pumps, outfall structures, and water control valves used to operate and maintain the conservation area. Habitat maintenance includes manual weeding of invasive species and application of herbicides as necessary. Maintenance activities are coordinated with the Border Patrol.

No significant issues arose at the site during FY18; however, the groundwater pump servicing the site experienced a 2-week-long downtime, and a small section of the perimeter road washed out in September at the southeast corner of Cell 3. The road was repaired quickly, and no additional washouts occurred.

4.0 MONITORING

4.1 Avian Monitoring

Avian monitoring in FY18 included surveys for southwestern willow flycatchers and riparian breeding birds.

4.1.1 Southwestern Willow Flycatcher Surveys

Surveys to detect the presence of southwestern willow flycatchers were conducted three times during FY18 in cottonwood-willow habitat. No breeding or resident southwestern willow flycatchers were detected. Migrant willow flycatchers (*Empidonax trailli*) were detected before June 24 and were not considered to be southwestern willow flycatchers. Most birds detected after June 24 or individuals detected repeatedly before June 24 are considered to be southwestern willow flycatchers. Birds detected before June 24 and those detected only once after June 24 are considered migrant willow flycatchers.

4.1.2 Yellow-billed Cuckoo Surveys

Hunters Hole was surveyed for yellow-billed cuckoos (*Coccyzus americanus occidentalis*) four times during FY18 from late June to early August. During the first survey period (June 15–30), there was one cuckoo detection. Two surveys are conducted during the second survey period (approximately July 1–31)

and resulted in one detection. Between August 1–15, there were no detections. This is the first year a yellow-billed cuckoo has been detected at Hunters Hole.

Breeding was not confirmed at Hunters Hole in FY18. Due to the behavior of this species, detections alone do not indicate the number of cuckoos present, nor do detections confirm breeding. The number, timing, and location of detections, along with behaviors observed, may be used to estimate abundance, distribution and/or breeding status. The possible, probable, and confirmed counts were used to estimate the number of breeding territories and not the number of breeding pairs. There was one possible territory at Hunters Hole in FY18.

4.1.3 General Avian Surveys

Bird surveys were conducted to detect breeding LCR MSCP riparian bird species and other territorial riparian bird species. Surveys were conducted within areas of the cottonwood-willow land cover types that were of adequate growth to support breeding birds. General bird surveys resulted in the detection of 10 species (18 territories) of birds breeding within the surveyed plots (table 1).

Table 1 shows the number of breeding territories for riparian birds at Hunters Hole in FY18.

Table 1.—Number of breeding territories per species detected at Hunters Hole, FY18

Species	Scientific name	Number of pairs
Abert's towhee	*Melozone aberti*	2
Anna's hummingbird	*Calypte anna*	4
Ash-throated flycatcher	*Myiarchus cinerascens*	2
Black phoebe	*Sayornis nigricans*	1
Black-tailed gnatcatcher	*Polioptila melanura*	1
Blue grosbeak	*Passerina caerulea*	1
Bullock's oriole	*Icterus bullockii*	1
Crissal thrasher	*Toxostoma crissale*	2
Verdin	*Auriparus flaviceps*	3
Western kingbird	*Tyrannus verticalis*	1

4.2 Small Mammal Monitoring

4.2.1 Bat Monitoring

One long-term monitoring station was operated at Hunters Hole during June, July, and August of 2018. Three LCR MSCP species were detected: western red bats (*Lasiurus blossevilli*), and western yellow bats (*Lasiurus xanthinus*), and

California leaf-nosed bats (*Macrotus californicus*) (Mixan and Diamond, *in press*). Table 2 summarizes the total number of nights the four LCR MSCP species were detected in FY18.

Table 2.—LCR MSCP bat detections by month at Hunters Hole, FY18

Month	Number of nights recorded	Total nights detected			
		Western red bat	Western yellow bat	California leaf-nosed bat	Pale Townsend's big-eared bat[1]
June	30	3	1	0	0
July	2	0	0	0	0
August	30	4	3	3	0

[1] Genetic analyses on the pale Townsend's big-eared bat indicate that the lower Colorado River is likely in the range of the Pacific Townsend's big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus townsendii townsendii*) rather than the pale Townsend's big-eared bat (Piaggio and Perkins 2005). The bats recorded along the lower Colorado River will be referred to as pale Townsend's big-eared bats in this report, as the nomenclature change has not yet been verified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

4.2.2 Rodent Monitoring

Live trapping was conducted on October 25, 2017, to determine presence of Yuma hispid cotton rats (*Sigmodon hispidus eremicus*). A total of 120 traps were set overnight. One Yuma hispid cotton rat was captured (Hill and Lyon 2019).

5.0 HABITAT CREATION CONSERVATION MEASURE ACCOMPLISHMENT

5.1 Vegetation Monitoring

Vegetation data were collected in FY17 using light detection and ranging (lidar). Lidar measures the vegetation structure and provides the ability to identify structural diversity and successional growth stages. Conservation area vegetation will be evaluated on a periodic basis using lidar to ensure the habitat is meeting species' requirements. A procedure to analyze and provide vegetation structure metrics will be developed, and the results will be presented in future reports.

5.2 Evaluation of Conservation Area Habitat

The process for Habitat Creation Conservation Measure Accomplishment was finalized in October 2011 (LCR MSCP 2011). All areas within Hunters Hole were designed to benefit covered species at the landscape level.

To meet species habitat creation requirements, the Habitat Conservation Plan provides goals for habitat creation based on land cover types. These land cover types are described using the Anderson and Ohmart vegetation classification system (Anderson et al. 1976, 1984a, 1984b). In 2018, there were no species with creditable acres at Hunters Hole.

6.0 ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Adaptive management relies on the initial receipt of new information, the analysis of that information, and the incorporation of the new information into the design and/or direction of future project work (LCR MSCP 2007). Under the Adaptive Management Program, habitat creation sites will be assessed for biological effectiveness and whether they fulfill the conservation measures outlined in the Habitat Conservation Plan for 27 covered species and if they potentially benefit 5 evaluation species. Post-development monitoring and species research results will be used to adaptively manage habitat creation sites after initial implementation. Once monitoring data are collected over a few years, and then analyzed for Hunters Hole, recommendations may be made through the adaptive management process for site improvements in the future.

There are no adaptive management recommendations for Hunters Hole at this time.

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